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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"~~~~~"

Hey, it's only April, so why not get a snowstorm?! Well, as typical as New England is, we had some cold and snowy weather this past week. Sure, it didn't stay on the ground long, but just the sight of it didn't do much for people's attitudes! I'm hoping that the weather improves soon - we need it.

So...a lot has happened since last week. After a lot of consideration and soul-searching, I decided to retire. Well, I resigned, with the intention of taking some time off from the workforce for a little while. I then plan to return to work, but not to what I'm currently doing. There were just too many issues going on at work that weren't going away anytime soon. Choices had to be made, and I made them. I feel great! Combine this with the inevitable onslaught of nice weather around here, and that's another plus. It won't all be rest and relaxation, as my wife has planned a number of "honey-do" projects that we've just never seemed to find the time to get done. But, I will get in some well-deserved golfing, and some much needed rest. I haven't had any time off since before the winter holidays, so I'm more than ready!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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[Editor's note: Due to the lack of discussion in the newsgroups this past week, Joe's column will be missing this week.]

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Violent Games Not Labeled Properly?

***** Blasting Cancer Via Video Games!
Game Law Is Unconstitutional!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Violent Video Games Often Not Properly Labeled

Most video games rated "M" for mature audiences fail to disclose violent content on their labels and can easily fall into the hands of children, according to a study released on Monday.

"Parents should not interpret the absence of a content descriptor to mean the absence of content," said study author, Kimberly Thompson of the Harvard School of Public Health.

"Parents and physicians should recognize that popular M-rated games contain a wide range of unlabeled content and may expose children and adolescents to messages that may negatively influence their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors," Thompson wrote in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

Researchers observed more than 6,000 character deaths, or 145 an hour, when they played 36 computer games randomly selected from 147 rated for players aged 17 or older.

They included popular games like "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" and "Resident Evil 3: Nemesis" which are played on video game consoles. In the last five years, 8- to 18-year-olds have nearly doubled the average amount of time spent playing such games from 26 to 49 minutes a day.

The study found around 80 percent of M-rated games included sex, violence, profanity, gambling or drug and alcohol use, none of which was described on the labels.

Previous studies have exposed how easy it is for children to get their hands on such games.

For example, the Federal Trade Commission reported in 2002 that 40 percent of M-rated games were purchased for children younger than 17, while 69 percent of unaccompanied children aged 13 to 16 were able to buy games intended for adults.

Other articles in the journal focused on the effects on children of watching TV violence.

Activity diaries kept by caregivers recording two days in the lives of 3,500 children aged 6 to 12 found that for each hour of violent TV watched, the children spent 20 to 25 fewer minutes with friends.

Researcher David Bickham of Harvard School of Public Health described the phenomenon as "a downward spiral from violent television viewing to aggressive behavior to social isolation to viewing more violent television.

"Exposure to violent television could, therefore, be the catalyst for a cyclical system leading toward an aggressive, socially isolated lifestyle," he wrote.

Judge Rules Video Game Law Unconstitutional

A U.S. District Court judge has ruled that a Michigan law that bans the sale of violent video games to minors is unconstitutional.

Federal District Judge George Caram Steeh issued the ruling in Detroit on Friday and said in court documents that video games were protected under the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

The law, signed by Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm last year, imposes civil and criminal penalties for anyone who knowingly distributes violent video games to a minor.

Steeh said in the ruling the state "lacked substantial evidence to show violent video games cause minors to have aggressive feelings or engage in aggressive behavior."

The Entertainment Software Association, the Video Software Dealers Association and the Michigan Retailers Association filed suit in September challenging the constitutionality of law.

Video Game Helps Young People Blast Cancer

Saif Azar, a 14-year-old video game fan, said a new title called "Re-Mission" helped arm him with the knowledge of how to fight cancer after he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2003.

"It was perfect, actually. It helped me understand the things that were going on in my body," said Azar, who started playing the game as part of a clinical study and continues playing today as he wraps up his treatments.

Roxxi, the main character in "Re-Mission," is a gutsy, fully-armed "Nanobot" who seeks out and destroys cancer cells throughout the body.

HopeLab, the game's maker, said the results from its scientific study involving 375 teen and young adults at 34 medical centers in the United States, Canada and Australia showed that young people who played "Re-Mission" were more likely to stick to their medication regimens than those who did not.

Palo Alto, California-base HopeLab is a nonprofit organization that helps young people deal with chronic illnesses. It was founded in 2001 by board chair Pamela Omidyar, wife of eBay Inc. founder and Chairman Pierre Omidyar.

The results showed that the game helped players feel empowered to confront

the challenge posed by their illness, which made them more likely to take their medicine - and more likely to get better, said HopeLab President Pat Christen.

"We approached the study in the same way and with the same rigor that we would with a new drug," she said.

HopeLab targeted teens and young adults because their health outcomes tend not to be as good as younger and older groups, she said.

"There is an assumption that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing and they're not monitored as closely," Christen said.

The PC game is immediately available, free of charge, to teens and young people diagnosed with cancer. It will be widely available on May 1 for a suggested donation of \$20.

PlayStation 3 Pricing Remains a Mystery

How much would you be willing to shell out for the PlayStation 3, with its eye-popping graphics, superior sound quality, and other home-entertainment features? The price tag for Sony's next-generation gaming console could be pretty steep when it is released, according to recent revelations by the company, although there is some confusion over just what the company said.

An executive with Sony Computer Entertainment Europe this week reportedly told a French radio station that the PS3 would list at 499 to 599 euros, which translates to some \$600 to \$750. That's considerably more than Microsoft's Xbox 360 console, which sells in the \$300 to \$400 range.

In the wake of this news, Sony clarified that estimate, saying the figures given were for a Blu-Ray high-definition video player, and were in U.S. dollars, not euros. Those numbers might make more sense, given that Blu-Ray players are expected to sell in the \$500 to \$1,500 range.

"It looks as though there was a mistranslation, and that the prices listed were for a Blu-Ray player, which means that we still don't know what the PS3 will cost," said gaming expert Paul Jackson, an analyst at Forrester Research.

He suggested that Sony will sell the PS3 for no more than \$500 in an effort to remain competitive with the Xbox 360 and Nintendo's forthcoming Revolution gaming console, although the price could be as high as \$800 at launch and drop thereafter.

While that's a lot of money, Sony contends that its latest console will do a lot more than play games. The device is being touted as an all-in-one home-entertainment hub that is powered by the supercomputer-grade Cell processor and the next-generation Blu-Ray disc technology. Moreover, Sony plans to introduce a MySpace-like online-gaming service when the console goes on sale in November.

"Sony says the PS3 is much more powerful than the PS2, and that it will introduce some attractive, high-definition game titles, but it probably won't be that much more compelling than the fully loaded Xbox 360," said Jackson.

One issue Sony has to deal with is that it can take a year or more after launch before the games that can truly take advantage of the console's capabilities are introduced. "And at this point, Microsoft has a head start and can start delivering better games by the time PS3 is launched," the analyst said.

The latest pricing confusion adds to Sony's perceived troubles regarding the PlayStation 3, which was to be introduced this spring but instead will debut seven months from now.

"They have had some problems getting innovative technology to work together, and getting the Blu-Ray specifications approved, but they can't price the PS3 \$200 more than the Xbox 360 if they want to attract buyers," Jackson said.

Still, he noted that, in the long run, the networking capabilities, high-definition video, and processing power of the PS3 could make a difference among gaming fans.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

How Common Is Identity Theft?

Wondering how likely you are to have your credit card number stolen? Well, according to a comprehensive survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), identity theft is affecting millions of households in the U.S. each year and costing an estimated \$6.4 billion per year.

About 3 percent of all households in the U.S., totaling an estimated 3.6 million families, were hit by some sort of ID theft during the first six months of 2004, according to DOJ data released this week.

The data comes from the Justice Department's National Crime Victimization Survey, which interviews members of 42,000 households across the country every six months to better understand the nature, frequency, and consequences of crime. Households that participate in the survey are selected at random and then interviewed by DOJ statisticians twice a year for three years.

The DOJ has been compiling this information for more than 30 years, but this marks the first time it has asked households about identity theft, said survey author Katrina Baum, a statistician with the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics.

According to the DOJ's numbers, credit card misuse is the most common consequence of identity theft. It accounted for about half of the cases of identity theft that the survey tracked, Baum said.

Of the other identity theft victims, about 25 percent had banking and other

types of accounts used without permission, 15 percent had their personal information misused, and about 12 percent faced a combination of several types of ID theft.

The average loss from these crimes amounted to \$1290, with two-thirds of respondents saying that the theft cost them money. Based on these numbers, the nationwide estimated loss during the six months of the study amounted to \$3.2 billion, for an annualized total of \$6.4 billion.

The young and the well-to-do appear to be more at risk for identity theft, according to the DOJ numbers. Households headed by people between 18 and 24 years of age and those with incomes of \$75,000 or more were the most likely to experience identity theft. Households in urban and suburban areas were also more likely to be affected.

According to Baum, 5 percent of households earning more than \$75,000 per year experienced this kind of crime. "It's usually a phenomenon that's experienced by the young and those in urban households," she said. The survey did not explore why this is the case.

Stopping PC Spies at the Gate

Although spyware has been called the plague of the Internet, some people still regard the invasive software as a kind of digital Avian flu - it is bad, and potentially very threatening, but happening to someone else.

That, many experts note, is a big mistake.

The prevalence of spyware, which usually slithers onto a system undetected during a download of other content, is formidable and poses a very real danger to every Internet user.

"You name it, spyware can do it," said Craig Schmugar, virus research manager at McAfee Avert Labs, which monitors Internet threats. "Everything from stealing your identity, turning your machine into a spam relay machine to popping up ads on your system. It can degrade your system performance to the point that using your machine is unbearable."

Spyware is a term that can be broken down into two categories, Schmugar said.

In the first category are the illegal, information-stealing threats that include Trojan viruses and "keylogger" programs that track user input. These are the villains of the Internet, and they pose a considerable risk to users. These types of programs are on the rise because the data extracted can be quite profitable to sellers.

Not all spyware is designed to be so harmful, though. The second category consists of programs intended to simply redirect users to different Web sites, or to collect general information on browsing habits.

"Advertisers often use spyware to cover competitors' Web sites," said Ben Edelman, a Harvard University researcher who focuses on spyware. "Where better can Netflix get a new customer than someone about to sign up with Blockbuster?"

If Netflix wanted to employ spyware, the company would hire an ad network,

which then would hire another ad network, which would buy ad space from a spyware vendor, Edelman noted. This chain of companies distances the legitimate business from spyware activity while still giving it an edge in the marketplace.

Although this type of spyware, also called adware, might not be designed to hijack a system or steal identities, it still can be annoying. Working in the background, it can gobble up processing power, severely slow down a system, and even cause frequent crashes. It might also prompt a significant increase in pop-up ads, an Internet phenomenon that is almost universally despised.

"The advertisers are profiting from this, as are the adware makers, and those affiliates who distribute the adware," said Schmugar. "A significant number of affiliates are indirectly violating adware makers' terms of service by exploiting system vulnerabilities to silently install adware."

Although some spyware is relatively benign, especially the type that simply tries to get users to view ads or visit a rival site, other types are downright scary.

Keylogging programs, for example, can capture passwords, user IDs, and personal information. This is not just the kind of stuff that absentminded people put on a Post-It note, either. Through keylogging, a phisher can read every e-mail sent, see every Web site visited, watch every e-commerce transaction, and secretly view private instant-messaging chats.

With all that information, identity theft would be child's play, and even worse, it could extend into every facet of a person's digital life. A phisher could send e-mails from a user's account, with keylogging software attached, that would then infect the person's entire network of family and friends.

As unsettling as it might be to have one's identity hijacked, the effect on someone's finances could be devastating. With this level of personal information, a phisher might set up an electronic checking account, transfer every dollar of a victim's bank account into it, and walk away. Just as a user is wrangling with the bank over what happened, the credit card bills are likely to start arriving.

Many phishing victims have reported feeling violated by the actions, as if the phisher had come into their homes while they were sleeping and cleaned them out.

But, to extend the metaphor, phishing can be even worse than outright property theft. Thanks to insurance, most valuables can be replaced. But with phishing, someone's information might be sold again and again on the underground data market, forcing a victim to spend thousands of dollars, and months of time, trying to clear his or her good name and recover financially.

Other scenarios might not be as frightening as losing one's digital identity, but prove annoying and frustrating nonetheless. A spyware creator could hijack a user's system, turning the computer into a spam-spewing zombie, or so severely cripple the machine that it is nearly unusable.

People who surf the Web in a corporate environment usually are protected. Computer network experts have become adept at putting up firewalls, blocking suspicious e-mail attachments, and watching for dubious download activity. Well aware of the spyware problem, many companies also do

periodic sweeps of their systems to remove any unwanted programs that sneaked through their filters.

But many home users are not so fortunate. Some have installed antispyware protection, but in general, many are at risk, said Harvard's Edelman. Also vulnerable are libraries, airports, and hotels, all of which offer open Internet access without spyware blockers.

According to antivirus software company Symantec, visiting certain Web sites also can affect the likelihood of being infected with spyware. In a recent experiment, researchers started with a fresh installation of Windows XP containing the latest security updates and spent an hour visiting well-known sites in major categories like gaming, shopping, travel, and kid-oriented fare.

What was left behind on the machines was compelling, Symantec noted. Sites for kids produced the most adware, downloading over 350 applications onto the system, but no pieces of spyware. In contrast, gaming sites caused only 23 adware applications to appear, but four spyware programs. Going to shopping sites resulted in no adware or spyware.

"What this experiment tells us is that if you want to avoid spyware, there are certain parts of the Web you should stay away from," said Dave Cole, director of Symantec Security Response. "They're the dark alleys of the Internet world. Basically, you visit a game cheat site, and you're vulnerable for spyware. A kids site will open you up to adware."

There are several spyware blockers and cleaners on the market, and Edelman noted that many users download programs like Ad-Aware, Webroot, and Counterspy.

A company started last year, SiteAdvisor, provides a system of automated testers that patrols the Web and gives out spyware safety ratings, allowing people to see if their favorite sites are really spyware havens. After downloading SiteAdvisor's software, people will see a small box in their browser with a red, yellow, or green icon to indicate the spyware threat level.

Antispyware tools work by scanning a computer system to find suspicious-looking programs that seem to have no business being in the machine, like adware, password crackers, remote-administration tools, jokes, and other applications. Some of what is caught is legitimate, which is why everything is usually presented in list format to a user, who can then sort the wanted from the junk.

Lately, though, even antispyware programs must be viewed with suspicion. A major trend has been the use of pop-ups by firms that allegedly provide free system scans and spyware cleaning. When a user chooses to accept the offer, he gets a message informing him that his system is riddled with spyware, even if it is perfectly clean. The irony is that during the scan, spyware is actually being installed.

"Stick with what you trust," said Symantec's Cole. "Don't use something from a pop-up ad that tries to scare you into downloading it because it has a funky, scary alert message."

Verizon Communications Inc. is proposing refunds to Internet customers who found legitimate e-mail from friends and businesses blocked by the company's spam filters.

In announcing a tentative settlement of a class-action lawsuit, both companies said Verizon has since refined its junk e-mail blockers to reduce such mistakes.

Verizon had blocked e-mail altogether from certain overseas Internet service providers - mostly from Europe and Asia - and failed to properly handle complaints, said Philadelphia attorney Michael Boni.

He believes that Verizon servers could not handle an increase in e-mail volume - and spam - before the 2004 holiday season, so the company decided to block e-mail from certain geographic areas. Verizon spokeswoman Bobbi Henson, however, said the filters were not designed to target any such regions.

The plaintiffs in the case include a lawyer with British clients and people with relatives overseas.

"This is not a class of people who want their spam," Boni said. "At the same time, they're not paying for such an overbroad spam policy that they're not going to get their e-mails."

The proposed settlement, if approved by the Los Angeles judge overseeing the case, covers business and residential customers who had broadband or dial-up service from Oct. 1, 2004, to May 31, 2005.

Customers could potentially get awards of \$3.50 per month, or up to \$28, plus any cancellations fees charged for dropping their service over missing e-mail.

"Verizon's always had very peculiar spam filters," said John Levine, a co-author of "Fighting Spam for Dummies." "From what I can tell, Verizon did lean too far in the 'losing real mail' side. But they learned their lesson."

Verizon, which now has 5.1 million Internet customers, refined its system but continues trying to strike a balance between too much and too little filtering, Henson said. The company, she said, also wants to block e-mail that contains viruses or scams.

Boni's firm, Kohn, Swift & Graf, is also seeking \$1.4 million in legal fees. The next court hearing is scheduled for June 20 in state Superior Court in Los Angeles.

Verizon has notified customers about the claim process. Information is also available at <http://www.emailblockingsettlement.com>.

The deadline for filing claims is Aug. 9. Customers who do not wish to accept the settlement terms must opt out by May 19.

Apple Puts Windows XP on the Mac

Apple Computer has released beta software that lets Mac users run

Microsoft Windows XP operating systems on Intel-based Macintosh computers, the company announced Wednesday.

Called Boot Camp, the software creates a hard drive partition for Windows XP and lets users choose between the two operating systems at start-up time. It's available now as a free trial beta that works only for a limited time, and will be included as a feature of the next major Mac OS release, Leopard, Apple said.

The move comes a few months after Apple introduced its first computers based on Intel's x86-type processors. The company has expressed little enthusiasm in the past for running Windows on its Macs - and even now doesn't sound entirely happy about it.

"Apple has no desire or plan to sell or support Windows, but many customers have expressed their interest to run Windows on Apple's superior hardware now that we use Intel processors," Phil Schiller, Apple's senior vice president of worldwide product marketing, said in a statement.

The company thinks Boot Camp will make its Macs more appealing to Windows PC users who might be considering a switch, he said.

Some Apple users had been keen to run Windows ever since the company said it would switch to Intel processors. Only a few weeks ago some hackers announced they had managed to get Windows XP running on Apple's machines.

The 83MB download is available from Apple's site. To use it, customers need the latest Mac OS X Tiger v10.4.6 release, an Intel-based Mac, 10GB of free hard disk space, a blank CD and a "bona fide" installation disc for Microsoft Windows XP, Service Pack 2, Home or Professional edition.

Boot Camp burns a CD with all the required Mac-specific drivers for Windows. It also walks users through creating a partition on the hard drive and installs a Startup Disk control panel for Windows. Users then hold down the "option" key at start-up to choose between the two operating systems, and the machine runs Windows "completely natively," Apple said.

The company couldn't resist a few digs at Microsoft on its Boot Camp Web site. "Word to the Wise," it said: "Windows running on a Mac is like Windows running on a PC. That means ita??ll be subject to the same attacks that plague the Windows world. So be sure to keep it updated with the latest Microsoft Windows security fixes."

Some Mac features won't work because of hardware incompatibilities, Apple said, including its remote control, wireless keyboard and mouse and the USB modem.

America Online Changes Name to AOL

It's official: America Online Inc. is now known simply as AOL. In an expected move, Time Warner Inc.'s Internet unit said Monday it has renamed itself; it also changed from being a corporation to a limited liability company.

"Our company long ago accomplished the mission implied by our old name. We literally got America online," said Jon Miller, chairman and chief executive of AOL LLC. "Our new corporate identity better reflects our

expanded mission - to make everyone's online experience better."

He added that consumers already know the service by its initials.

AOL formed as Quantum Computer Services in 1985 and started offering the AOL online service in 1989, beginning with Apple Computer Inc.'s systems. The company changed its name to America Online Inc. in 1991.

The company merged with Time Warner Inc. in 2001 to form AOL Time Warner Inc., but as the Internet access business declined, the parent company dropped AOL from its name and became once again just Time Warner Inc.

AOL had 19.5 million U.S. subscribers as of Dec. 31, a 27 percent drop from its peak of 26.7 million in September 2002. Over the past year, AOL has been increasingly shifting its efforts at making articles, video and other materials available for free through its ad-supported sites.

Apple Releases Mac OS X 10.4.6

Apple on Monday released an update for Mac OS X, bringing the current version of the operating system to 10.4.6. The update addresses several issues with the Finder and networking, as well as fixing problems with some Apple and third-party applications.

Among the changes in Mac OS X 10.4.6, Apple fixed an issue where the operating system might stop responding when a user tries to login to a FileVault image that has been damaged. Users will now see an alert message that reads, You are unable to log in to the user account (name) at this time.

Shutdown times in the Energy Saver System Preferences will now work as expected when the user is at the login window. With 10.4.6, if you change your login password at the Login window, you will now be given an opportunity to apply the same change to your default keychain.

Several issues with Apple's applications have been fixed in the newest update including an issue in which Mail could unexpectedly quit when lowering the quote level within a reply message. An issue where iChat, on an Intel-based Mac with a built-in iSight camera, could sometimes stop displaying video from the iSight camera until the computer was shut down and started up again has also been fixed.

A problem was addressed that caused some of the iMovie window to turn black when dragging a movie clip into iMovie 6 on an Intel-based Mac. IF you use Disk Utility to repair permissions, you will no longer see the We are using special permissions for messages.

Aperture received a couple of fixes, as well. EXIF data is now exported with TIFF images in Aperture and Aperture will no longer unexpectedly quit when exporting a file with keywords that contain twelve or more Cyrillic characters.

The update also includes iSync 2.2, which provides support for additional mobile phones.

Third-party application fixes include an issue in which Blizzard World of Warcraft character graphics could be distorted on an Intel-based Mac with

a built-in graphics processor when vertex shaders are enabled. The update also fixed a problem for Aspyr Media's True Crime: The Streets of LA game in which game movies are very dim on Intel-based Macs.

Mac OS X 10.4.6 also improves character graphics appearance for Aspyr Media's The Sims House Party when running with Rosetta on an Intel-based Mac.

Users of Microsoft Word will no longer receive an error message, Word cannot complete the operation because too many files are open when autosaving a document to a network-based home directory.

A full list of changes and links to the Mac OS X 10.4.6 download is available from Apple's Web site or via the Software Update mechanism in Mac OS X.

Europeans Rush to Get '.eu' Domain Names

Some 300,000 Europeans rushed to register their new ".eu" domain names in the first hour of being able to sign up for the new Internet addresses, officials said Friday.

By midday, registrations had exceeded 550,000.

Until Friday, registration was limited to specific groups, such as registered trademark owners, public bodies and companies. Now, anyone who resides in the 25-nation European Union can buy a name on a first-come, first-served basis.

EU Commissioner Viviane Reding said the Commission hopes the new ".eu" name will one day rival the ".com" name.

"Europe and its citizens can now project their own Web identity, protected by EU rules," she said.

The initial registrations Friday mostly came from Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium, Reding said. Previously, special groups registered 320,000 names since that became available in December.

All EU institutions, including the Commission, European Parliament and the EU's general Web site will switch to the ".eu" name on May 9, Europe Day, Reding said.

Before the creation of ".eu," Europeans had to choose between a national domain such as ".fr" for France or a global one like ".com," often seen as American. Officials from the EU small business lobby UEAPME said the ".eu" name could be useful for companies that serve several or all European countries.

EU officials urged consumers to be cautious over registration charges. They said they found names available for as little as \$14.77.

There are about 250 domain names on the Internet, but they are typically assigned by country or territory.

The Internet's key oversight agency, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, made an exception because EU is on a special "reserved"

list kept by the International Organization for Standards, a worldwide standardization body.

ICANN also is considering a ".asia" name for that continent.

How to apply for ".eu" name at EURid: <http://www.eurid.eu/en>

EU general Web site: <http://www.europa.eu.int>

Microsoft Shows Linux the Love

With a high-profile executive speech at LinuxWorld and the launch of a new Web site focusing on open source, Microsoft has been cozying up to the Linux penguin this week.

The new Web site is called Port 25, named after the network port on computer systems that regulates e-mail traffic. Through interviews and information, the site highlights the work of the Microsoft Open Source Software Lab.

In his keynote at LinuxWorld, Microsoft's general manager for platform strategy, Bill Hilf, noted that the site is geared toward improving discussion between Microsoft and open-source developers.

Hilf said in his speech that the site, along with other Microsoft initiatives, represents an evolution away from the "myopic thinking that there is only one tool or one model to solve a problem."

Despite its ongoing "Get the Facts" advertising campaign, which positions Microsoft software as superior to Linux, Microsoft does not believe that it has always been on the other side of open source.

"There has been a very positive reaction to our open formats, although there's still perception from some quarters that we're the enemy of open source," said Microsoft general manager Alan Yates in an interview. "That's just not the case."

Yates noted that the recent wrangle in Massachusetts, in which the state was considering moving away from Microsoft's software, raised hackles in Redmond because the company felt it was not given the chance to highlight its own open formats.

"There's a growing awareness about Microsoft's approach to opening formats," he said. "We expect that to continue."

In addition to touting its open formats, Microsoft has indicated in other ways that it wants to play nice with open source. For example, the company announced plans this week to run and support Linux in its Virtual Server product.

Microsoft also plans to deliver software for developers to write programs that run well in rival browsers rather than tying them to Internet Explorer.

These and other moves by the company are a nod toward greater software interoperability, a notion discussed in February by Bill Gates.

"We want to further eliminate friction among heterogeneous architectures and applications without compromising their distinctive underlying capabilities," Gates said in a recent statement.

EBay Sellers Can No Longer Offer To Receive Cash

EBay Inc. no longer allows sellers to offer the choice of cash payments, a move meant to discourage use of an option favored by scam artists.

The new policy implemented this year means sellers cannot list as payment options mailing cash or instant cash transfers from companies like Western Union or MoneyGram, EBay spokesman Hani Durzy said Wednesday. Sellers, however, can list cash on delivery or in-person delivery of payment as options.

"The whole purpose of this is to create a safe environment on the site by requiring sellers to offer what we consider to be safer payment services," Durzy said.

EBay deletes seller listings offering what the online marketplace considers unsafe payment options. The company, however, won't say how many listings have been deleted or the number of scam sites shutdown by the company.

Nevertheless, con artists are a problem on the marketplace.

Tiffany & Co., for example, has sued EBay in New York, claiming the company has failed to take adequate steps to remove fake Tiffany jewelry from the site. The jewelry seller estimates that at least three out of four Tiffany products sold on EBay are counterfeit. The state court lawsuit is pending.

Payment options that EBay, based in San Jose, Calif., deems acceptable include its own PayPal service, credit cards, debit cards and bank-to-bank electronic payments.

Virtualization Fever at LinuxWorld Expo

The most prominent names in open source descend on Boston this week for the annual LinuxWorld Conference and Expo. Highlights of the show will include a new Mobile and Embedded conference track and a Grid Solution Showcase, but the hottest trend seems to be virtualization, with several new offerings set to debut throughout the week.

XenSource, which markets commercial products based on the open source Xen virtualization software, is expected to introduce XenEnterprise, a proprietary solution that can virtualize any x86 OS, including Windows, in addition to OSes that have been custom modified for Xen. The new product ships with management tools and requires virtualization-enabled processors from AMD or Intel to run unmodified OSes.

Virtual Iron, expected to announce Version 3.0 of its virtual infrastructure software at the show, is also putting its weight behind Xen. As does XenEnterprise, the new release will support Intel VT and AMD Pacifica-enabled processors to allow virtualization of Windows and other unmodified operating systems. Rounding out the offering is Virtual Iron s

policy-based Virtualization Manager, which provides a central console for monitoring and automating virtual resources.

Many industry analysts see Xen as tough competition for VMware, which markets its own line of products based on a proprietary virtualization engine. VMware's recent decision to release its entry-level VMware Server product free of charge could be construed as an attempt to counter the momentum of its open source competitor. At LinuxWorld, VMware is expected to open its product line even further, by making its virtual machine disk format available to developers without royalty, restriction, or license. This move should allow a wider range of developers to join companies such as Altiris, BMC, IBM, and Symantec in building add-on products that work with VMware.

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